

## Article

# The Mystical World of the Body in the Bengali Tantric Work *Nigūḍhārthaprakāśāvali*

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**Abstract:** Amongst the wide collection of literature on the Bengali Tantric Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās, the works of Mukundadāsa (or Mukundadeva) and his disciples are counted among the most influential. Those Middle Bengali texts that are usually recognized as a group of the four main texts of Mukunda and his circle or followers are commented in the work *Nigūḍhārthaprakāśāvali* (NPV, ‘The Array of lights on the hidden meanings’) by various disciples of this line. The main goal of this paper is to shed light on some aspects of the religious experience in the regional Tantric tradition. As we may suppose, the descriptions included in NPV refer to some previous experiences of the authors (gurus) of the tradition and describe imaginary internal worlds of the body in the manner specific to that tradition, using various esoteric terms and describing also various kinds of religious discipline (*sādhana*). This means the presentation of the relatively poorly known and still not well-studied Bengali Tantra is expressed in the vernacular Bengali language (Middle Bengali, madhyajuger Bāṅglā). I will try to demonstrate how the image of the human body (and its imagination in this particular tradition) serves as the basis for the religious experience.

**Keywords:** Tantra; Bengal; Sahajiyā; body; mystical experience; yogic body

## 1. Introductory Remarks

Amongst the wide collection of literature on the Bengali Tantric Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās<sup>1</sup>, the works of Mukundadāsa or Mukundadeva and his disciples are counted as among the most influential. Those Middle Bengali texts,<sup>2</sup> which are usually recognized as a group of the four main texts of Mukunda and his circle or followers, contain the following works: *Āgamasāra* of Yugala dāsa, *Ānandabhairava* of Prema dāsa, *Amṛtaratnāvalī* of Mukundadāsa (ARV) and *Amṛtarasāvalī* of some disciple of Mukunda. These texts were probably composed in the second part of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century. The *Nigūḍhārthaprakāśāvali* (NPV, ‘The Array of lights on the hidden meanings’) was likely written in the next few decades after the composition of those enumerated above, meaning the beginning of the 18th century, but this must be considered as estimate<sup>3</sup>. NPV presents the four texts as a sequence of the most important works of the tradition. In this way the works of Mukundadāsa or Mukundadeva<sup>4</sup> and his line are recognized in the Bengali Tantric Vaiṣṇava circles as an important part of the tradition,

<sup>1</sup> Sahajiyā is a term used widely in Bengali literature. Despite problems with its accuracy I use this as reference to the Tantric Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal, which themselves identify as practicing *sahaja dharma*.

<sup>2</sup> All translations and transcriptions from Bengali are my own. The numeration of the folios of the manuscripts and particular lines are included in the footnotes.

<sup>3</sup> According to consultations with a Bengali specialist in manuscriptology of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (Kolkata), Dr. Mitra Tanmay, the copy of NPV (n.d.) (manuscript no 1525) comes from the 18th century, which certainly is a very general opinion but at least gives some approximation of its time of composition.

<sup>4</sup> Bengali tradition recognizes at least three Mukundas living in the 16th–17th century who were important for the development the Vaiṣṇava and Sahajiyā circles. The problem was elaborated by Jhā [2012] 2020).

and have featured prominently in the research into Bengal Sahajiyās, which started at the beginning of the 20th century (the first works of M.M. Basu (Bose) contain significant references to NPV). NPV reflects the problem of the homogeneity of the Tantric Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇava category understood as the syncretic Bhakti-Tantric traditions in Bengal, which consisted of the complex web of the line of the gurus (Chakrabarty 1985; Chakrawarti 2017). Nevertheless, in the case of guru Mukunda, we have the widespread and influential tradition of Bengal Vaiṣṇava Tantra known to various local Tantric groups and confirmed up to contemporary times in the form of the tradition of Mukunda's line (*Mukunder śrota*, (Chakrawarti 2017; Jhā [2012] 2020). The center of this line is Patuli in the Bardhaman District in the northern part of the Indian state of West Bengal. Authorship of the four texts commenting on NPV is doubtful, but the widespread presence of manuscripts with *bānita* (traditional identification of the author of a text at the end of a manuscript) of Mukunda indicates authority in the world of Bengali Vaiṣṇava Tantra connected with this name.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, Mukunda was the name of an important figure in the Vaiṣṇava literature, and various other Mukundas of Tantric provenience have been based on the authority of that famous name, which is recognized both in Vaiṣṇava and Sahajiyā circles.<sup>6</sup> However, historical issues are secondary in this paper, and we may sum up that the so-called Bengali Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā tradition recognizes Mukunda and his disciples as important figures in the development of the Tantric (Sahajiyā) wing of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism.

Below we focus on the topics that are presented in the text of NPV and the interpretation of those obscure texts. In this way the main goal of this paper is to shed light on some aspects of the religious experience in the regional Tantric tradition. As we may suppose, the descriptions included in NPV refer to some previous experiences of the authors (gurus) of the tradition, and describe imaginary internal worlds of the body in the manner specific to that tradition, using various esoteric terms and describing also various kinds of religious discipline (*sādhana*). Therefore, the primary goal of this paper is to present the narration referring to specific religious experience in the vernacular Bengali tradition, which in some aspects is different from Sanskrit based tantras. This means the presentation of the relatively poorly known and still not well-studied Bengali Tantra which is expressed in the vernacular Bengali language (Middle Bengali, madhyajuger Bāṅlā) in the form of the rare commentary literature of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā tradition. Moreover, I will try to demonstrate how the image of the human body (and its imagination in this particular tradition) serves as the basis for religious experience.

## 2. Methodological Remarks

Studies into religious and mystical experience represent a wide area of various fields and might be correlated with various sub-disciplines and neighboring disciplines like the study of meditation or the more psychologically or neurobiologically oriented disciplines of psychology of religion and philosophy. This kind of research touches upon the subjective human experiences of variously conceived divinities, which are difficult to define and grasp empirically. Numerous authors have tried to define and classify

<sup>5</sup> Besides Mukunda, the most frequent symbolic authorship in this literature are important figures from Caitanya circles like Kṛṣṇadāsa, Svārūpa Damodara, and Narottama and their disciples.

<sup>6</sup> Apart from the problems mentioned above, NPV and the texts that are the substrate of the analyzed work probably consist of the oldest layer of the tradition of Vaiṣṇava Tantric (Sahajiyā) in Bengal, which is rooted in the 17th century or even earlier. As discussed by E.C. Dimock and others, they were connected with the spread of the Vaiṣṇava movement by Caitanya and his disciples in the second half of the 16th century and first half of the 17th century (Dimock 1989; Dāsa 1978, 1988; Hayes 1995, 2001). We cannot rule out the possibility of the existence of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā groups before Caitanya, although only after the activities of Caitanya and his followers in Bengal is the existence of the so-called Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās confirmed in the textual layer. However, the peak of their activity and influence is fixed in the second part of the 17th century and the 18th century. Many aspects of the historical and textual development of those groups are very obscure and difficult to interpret (Chakrabarty 1985; Jhā [2012] 2020). Moreover, amongst the Middle Bengali texts collectively grouped as Sahajiyā, we may find works that present similar ideas, like those found in NPV, and their language and style indicate the authorship of adepts perhaps belonging to Mukunda's line or at least having knowledge about ARV and remaining important works. To those we can include *Bhṛṅgaratnāvalī* of Prema Dāsa (Asiatic Society, Manuscript G-4967, Dāsa n.d.b), *Padmamālā* of Rāmacandra Dāsa (Asiatic Society, manuscript G-1950, Dāsa n.d.a), and other works like *Vrajarasakalpa* of Narasimha Dāsa, who was considered to be Mukunda's disciple (Jhā [2012] 2020, pp. 237–48).

mystical experience; for example, (Stace 1960) proposed that nondual mystical experience represents a ‘pure mystical experience’ (‘introvertic’), excluding in this way other types of such experiences such as visual or dualistic experience, or ecstatic events or trance. The so-called perennialist position recognizes mysticism as a universal experience which appears in various cultural and religious contexts, although its roots remain the same. Steven Katz and Hans Penner criticized the perennialist position and idea of the universal mystical experience (Katz 1978). According to Katz, experience is constructed by the cultural and ideological context of the subject and hence various ‘mystical traditions’ consist of separate structures and doctrines, and hence create different experiences in various religions (Katz 1978, 1983). Other authors have provided wider perspectives, like those based on the division of the nondual experience (‘pure consciousness event’) and dualistic mystical states trying to find a consensus between the perennialist and constructivist positions (Forman 1999; Jones 1993). Ninian Smart proposed potentially more elaborate typologies of religious/mystical experience for the use of Religious Studies that recognized various types of mystical experiences like numinotic, penenheistic, bhakti and contemplative (Smart 1996). Also useful in the research of the narration of religious or mystical experience is the work of Wach (1951), who postulated that that primeval field of research for Religious Studies should be the communication of how humans express religious experience leading to religious union with numen. Religious experience has a tendency to be expressed in three dimensions: theoretical, practical and social (Szyjewski 2011, p. 12). Various authors have tried to correct and develop further adequate theoretical basis for adequate research on mystical experience, leading to contextual and attributive (ascriptive) approaches (Proudfoot 1985; Taves 2009). June McDaniel’s work (McDaniel 1989) is exceptional in its consideration of religious experience in the context of Bengal<sup>7</sup>. Insofar as I am skeptical towards the general term ‘mysticism’ in the sense of the more or less coherent ‘mystical tradition’ or ‘traditions’ of world religions, I recognize and use with some limitations the term ‘mystical’ referring to some unique kind of religious experience put in a particular cultural and historical context. Such experiences are correlated with unique states of consciousness, or at least are expressed as such in the literature.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in this paper I use the term ‘mystical’, which conceives of a the unique kind of religious experience during which a subject is under the influence of altered (or unusual) states of consciousness (Kokoszka 2007; Tart 1975; Ludwig 1966; Hobson 2001, 2007; Taves 2009) and experiences, dreams or hallucinates objects that are not accessible in the common states of the consciousness. Those experiences have reference to some theologically conceived ultimate reality and have absolute characteristics such as god, a nondual state or liberation, and union with a deity (Brainard 1996). Such experiences are not understood as perennial, but as rooted and mediated by culture and environment, and they are constructed by blending various external factors.<sup>9</sup> The knowledge about such experiences and methods of achieving them have been expressed in textual and oral traditions, and such narratives are transmitted by traditions and enhanced by the line of the members of a particular tradition, which was a traditional scheme of the transmission and preservation of knowledge in archaic or esoteric societies (Lauglin 1997).

### 3. The Text and Its Subject

This text and other so-called medieval Sahajiyā literature might be generally characterized by the fusion of various Tantric, yogic and bhakti elements. The texts of Mukunda and other authors contain fascinating descriptions of mystical landscapes, imaginary worlds, subtle Yogic bodily arteries, gates, ponds and ghāṭas (landing places). The texts and their substrate are still not well-researched,

<sup>7</sup> The lack of space does not allow reference to the whole spectrum of theories or literature that influenced the author and potentially might be used in research on mystical experience—some reference to the religious, anthropological and other theories found their place in this paper, such as these of the cognitive study of metaphor of Lakoff and Johnson.

<sup>8</sup> The mapping of ASC in a broader phenomenological manner that might be used by scholars in Religious Studies is an endeavor of the Walsch [1993] 2003. More psychobiologically oriented perspectives include: Austin (1999), and the profound study on shamanism by Winkelman, d’Aquili and Newberg (1999).

<sup>9</sup> However, some of them might have universal characteristics that will be mentioned at the end of the paper.

even though they make up one of the most important parts of the tradition (Basu (Bose) 1932; Dāsa and Hayes 2001, 2006; Jhā [2012] 2020). The text of NPV might be considered unique amongst many Sahajiyā texts because of its detailed descriptions and status as a commentary on the earlier important works of the tradition. The work is a fine example of the description of the imaginary mystical worlds and Tantric discipline elaborated around the human body, which is a substrate for such visionary experience. Most importantly, NPV represents commentary literature, which is quite rare in the case of Vaiṣṇava Bengali Tantrics. The text is a kind of loose commentary on earlier texts, and to some degree it defines the hierarchy of the texts of the Mukunda line. It is not a strict and systematic commentary; nevertheless, it is quite useful for at least partial interpretation of the previous texts of Mukunda and his school. It is significant that the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā texts usually do not have commentaries (as underlined for example by G. A. Hayes (Hayes 2001, p. 308). However, as already mentioned, NPV is only a fragmentary and quite obscure commentary. Some subjects concerning the dehatattva are explained by the use of very peculiar esoteric language, and the reader remains under the impression that his or her understanding is no better fulfilled than at the beginning of the research endeavor. Various terms and concepts in the texts might be understood using various strategies of interpretation. For example, terms like ‘rati’, ‘rasa’ or ‘rūpa’ might refer either to the theological terms used by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, or have Tantric meaning and denote the bodily fluids.

In an effort to provide the description of the dehatattva or cosmophysiology of the body and realize the abovementioned goals of the paper, I focus mainly on the first part of NPV. Those descriptions referred to are known from another source on the ‘Yogic body’ consisting of the internal center (here: *sarovaras* or ponds, or *dvāra*, ‘gates’) and network of the *nāḍīs* or internal arteries, and other places or points of meditation in human body such as lotuses in the limbs or mandalas in particular regions of the body. Authors use various metaphors and allegories to present the complexity of the body and bodily discipline to the adept. As mentioned above, various key terms that are used frequently in the work have wide meanings and might be interpreted as referring either to the mental, emotional states, or to the bodily fluids. The term *rasa* might have been a technical term used in theology and refer to a mystical state, to Kṛṣṇa, or it might instead denote semen in particular or sexual fluids in general. On the other hand, the word *rasa* creates various compounds like *samarasa* (‘taste of sameness’) or *premarasa* (‘taste of mystical love’).

The citations in this paper illustrate how the adept should visualize the internal worlds, and how through the discipline of the inherent (*sahaja sādhana*), one experiences the internal worlds of the body. For example, directing to the particular entrances and arteries of the body is connected with various kinds of discipline; the left entrance, for instance, leads to the ‘discipline of the desire’:

*On the left side of it is discipline of desire, it is written that it is on the north direction. The gate of the desire remains on the left.*

The right direction, on the other hand, leads to the ‘discipline of the mystical love’ (*premer sādhana*). The narration frequently runs according to this scheme—author/authors describe various elements of the internal body and ensure the adept will certainly recognize it if they follow the proper path:

*[Now] are explained the nine joints and nine gates, inside there are six doors—you will certainly recognize them.*

Clearly NPV is a text not addressed to the common public or outsiders, but to the adepts of *sahaja dharma*. The author or authors repeatedly claim that believers (*bhaktas*) or (our) people or people (those who are initiated properly or are connoisseurs or *rasika*) understand those topics, but common people (*jīvā*), the uninitiated and fools, will not understand it.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Moreover, its size makes it a quite-elaborate and detailed text. It comprises more than 30 folios, which makes it an exceptionally long text, taking into consideration the literature of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās (the manuscript from Bangiya Sahitya

The text of the NPV is rather nonsystematic, but basically contains two parts. The first part is a commentary on the four abovementioned texts with some casual citations from other works. The next part contains a discussion of the various esoteric topics of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā tradition. It has a partial form of the dialogue between Hara (Śiva) and Gauri (Pārvatī). However, in this paper I mainly draw upon the first part of the work which refers directly to the important texts of the tradition ('commentary part'). In this part the author/authors refer to the experience of the divine (*bhaga, paramātmā*) in the body, how it is divided and spreads in the body, and knowledge about the internal or Yogic/mystical body (*dehatattva*) and Tantric discipline (*sādhana*). Śaktināth Jhā, in his recent Bengali edition of NPV (which he based on another manuscript from his own collection) divides the text into two main chapters (*parva*, (Jhā [2012] 2020): the first is called *Bhāṣāratnāvalī* ('The necklace of the narration'), and the second is *Nigūḍhārthaprakāśāvalī* ('The Array of lights on the hidden meanings'). This division does not overlap strictly with the abovementioned contents and the second *parva* (according to the Jhā edition of *Nigūḍhārthaprakāśāvalī*) also contains references to the four key texts. However, the abovementioned division of the text is not present in manuscripts that were available to me. In any case, this reflects the rather chaotic nature of the work, and the repetitions and contradictions are likely the result of the process of the compilation of the root texts and the fusion of the commentaries by various authors. Jhā claims, there were at least three authors—Vamśīvadana Dāsa, Gauri Dāsa and some unknown disciple of the first one (Jhā [2012] 2020, p. 142). First, two authors commented on the text of Mukunda and other texts. Secondly, another author expanded the explanations of the esoteric topics. I believe that this text is important as an illustration of the development of Mukunda's school and regional Tantric schools generally, whose literature is mainly written in the Middle Bāṅglā (Bengali) vernacular<sup>11</sup>. In an endeavor to shed light on the obscure texts of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās, I have decided to refer in this paper mainly to NPV, although ARV is more popular and older. However, NPV contains excerpts of ARV and comments on it. I believe that from the point of view of Religious Studies, it is more interesting to look at the religious tradition through the lens of not only the root text but also the commentaries with all the consequences of such development of the particular religious tradition.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Sahajiyā Doctrine and Religious Experience

What is the religious doctrine and practice presented in NPV and similar literature denoted generally as Sahajiyā or Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā? The sahaja dharma is the discipline based on what is natural and inherent to the body and its functions like sex. This tradition stresses that direct ritual experience of the potential hidden in the human body should be activated and used by the adept (Dasgupta 1946; Jhā [2012] 2020). Bliss coming from the sexo-yogic Tantric ritual is transformed and equated with the bliss of the divine, and it signifies the return to the primeval state of fullness and happiness. Sahaja is a key term on which is built a particular kind of religious experience, and sahaja itself is an equivalent of

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Parishad has 31 folios). The text of NPV has not yet been well-researched, particularly in comparison to other texts of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās like ARV or Vivartavilāsa (VV), which have been fully published and examined in the academic literature (Bose 1930; Dāsa [1364] 1948; Dasgupta 1946; Dāsa 1972; Dimock 1989; Stewart 2010). A few excerpts of NPV were cited by Manidramohan Basu (Bose 1930) and Paritosa Dāsa (Dāsa 1972). The exception is the recent Bengali work of Śaktināth Jhā, who summed up our data and presented a transcription based on the available manuscripts (Jhā [2012] 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Some authors argue on the basis of certain texts the thesis that primeval main Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā texts were composed in Sanskrit. This is certainly difficult to prove and doubtful; however, as I have argued, there are some texts which induce us to treat this concept at least partially seriously (Czyżykowski 2016).

<sup>12</sup> In this article I use primarily two manuscripts: manuscript no. 1525 (NPV n.d.) of the collection of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in Kolkata, and manuscript no. 299 of the Sukumar Sen Collection, National Library, Kolkata (previously in Bardhamān, collection of Sukumar Sen, Manring, Basu 2006). I have also consulted the text with Jhā's transcription (in Bengali). However, some readings presented here differ from those of Jhā's edition. The citations in the paper are based on Bangiya Sahitya Parishad's (BSP) manuscript, unless it is a different reading, then the manuscript of the National Library was used. In the case of ARV and other important works cited in NPV, I used available manuscripts and printed editions. ARV manuscripts of Calcutta University include manuscripts 6541 and 595 (Mukundadeva n.d.) (there are minor differences in the text). Printed editions of ARV and the remaining three works include those in Basu (Bose) (1932), Dāsa (1972), Jan Brzezinski's Roman transcription online (based on the Paritosh Dāsa edition), Thāndār (2012) and Śaktināth Jhā [2012] 2020.



the ultimate state identified by Tantric Vaiṣṇavas with realization of the union of the Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in one's own body. The body is then understood as a microcosm of the typical Hindu Puranic fourteen worlds, various sacred rivers and all substances required for the perfection of the human. The concept of the body is actually the basis and substrate of those internal imaginative worlds and experiences of the divine state (*rasa*)<sup>13</sup>. The terminology involved here is specific to the Bengali Vaiṣṇava Tantric school, enriched by Bengali Tantric vocabulary<sup>14</sup>. A considerable portion of the text of NPV refers to the mythological themes of the Vaiṣṇava world, and some to the Tantric visualization schemes that take the shape of the goddesses of a particular circle (*maṇḍala*) or the females of the bodily senses. Some other parts refer to obscure figures and places like forts or villages. Finally, some other passages describe the so-called subtle Yogic physiology also connected with traditional Indian medicine. These models of that internal Yogic body and symbolism used in NPV and other texts are in some aspects distinct in comparison to other Yogic Tantric systems, but some general schemes such as the main three *nāḍīs* (*idā*, *piṅgalā* and *suṣumnā*) are common to both models. As the work is quite vast, here I refer only to some selected prominent topics of NPV.

Interpretation of various esoteric<sup>15</sup> topics in NPV might differ, and such strategies as the interpretation of various key terms as symbolic might be embraced with support of the Vaiṣṇava theology. On the other hand, topics might be understood in accordance with the Yogic and Tantric doctrines and be seen as physical, bodily substances. It is certainly a more difficult and fundamental question of how to interpret such obscure, esoteric texts, to see them as the Vaiṣṇava Tantric or representing some archaic system of Tantra in North-East India that adjusted popular Vaiṣṇava terminology to achieve its own goals, and fit them into the dominating theological and social system in Bengal of 17th–18th centuries (this has been postulated by Dasgupta and others who consider Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās as a part of the universal 'Sahajiyā tradition' (Dasgupta 1946). In a typical manner for mystical literature, such descriptions of the internal worlds are nonsystematic, sometimes even chaotic, and contain references to lights, jewels and obscure figures. They are described in an obscure language full of metaphors, symbols and allegories (Mukhopādyaḥ 1975; Hayes 2001, 2006, 2011).

The text of this school opens before the reader very unique mystical worlds, but on the other hand it confirms the universal human tendency to create imaginary religious worlds. On which elements are such internal worlds built? Is this only imagination? Or are they rooted in some sort of altered state of consciousness, where one's own body might be perceived as transformed and permeated by divine forces or elements/phenomena? A dominant topic of NPV is *dehatattva* or esoteric knowledge about the body based on the Tantric Yogic and mythological scheme. *Bhṛṅgaratnavālī* (folio 10a, line 1) refers to ARV as a text that "explains the lotuses" or bodily internal centers; NPV also elaborates on that topic and devotes much space to elaborate descriptions of internal arteries, ponds and lotuses. Undoubtedly, this topic is of key importance for this tradition. It seems that the internal world of Tantric Vaiṣṇavas is on the one hand based on the mystical literature of Vaiṣṇavas, while on the other hand it refers to some other Tantric schemes or even uses metaphors common to the Gangetic delta network of rivers and channels (see below). This kind of element of *dehatattva*, correlated with the *rasa* doctrine, constructs another form of experience built on the metaphor of fluidity (Hayes 2001).

To start an introduction to the text it is also not out of place to enumerate various components of the ideology and ritual behind the text of NPV. We find here several elements that create a peculiar blend of practices and concepts:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The term 'rasa' in esoteric Sahajiyā vocabulary has various meanings either referring to the state of mystical rapture or to the bodily sexual fluids.

<sup>14</sup> However, in NPV 'sahaja' appears mainly in compounds with other terms and does not stand in the text separately. The most frequent term is 'sahaja vastu' or primeval substance/state.

<sup>15</sup> I use the term 'esoteric' in a similar manner to that proposed by H. B. Urban: an esoteric ritual creates the homology between the body of the practitioner, the hierarchy in the cosmos and the community (Urban 1997).

<sup>16</sup> The reader may find wider explanations of these terms and ideas in the cited literature.

- concentration on the body as a matrix of practice—human body is a microcosmos and reflects the whole cosmos;
- the specific idea of the internal body (ponds, rivers);
- the idea of *sahaja* (primeval reality is identified here with the state of mystical love of Vaiṣṇavas);
- fullness and bliss are achieved by sexual union and Tantric Yoga: sexual yogic or *yugala* practice;
- use of all the senses in the ritual discipline (metaphorical fight of the senses expresses the erotic union);
- use of the bodily elements/fluid—male *bījā* and female *raja*;
- menstrual blood plays a pivotal role as a power (*tejas*) of paramātma;
- *prema*—idea of the mystical, divine love of Vaiṣṇavas;
- *rasa* (‘mystical rapture’, mystico-esthetical experience) understood as experience of *prema* on the human level identified with bodily fluids;
- specific use of the terminology of binary Tantric principles based on Vaiṣṇava theology and poetry: *rati-rasa*, *madana-mādana*, *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa*;
- *vartamāna* (idea of sensual experience of reality through ritual and Yoga, opposite to *anumāna*, intellectually comprehending the reality dominating in Vedānta);
- *samarasa*—experience of oneness;
- *vastu*—primeval substance or primeval matter.

## 5. Subtle Body Quest

In both colonial times and nowadays, such somatic models have awakened major interest in the New Age movement, humanistic psychology and the modern Yogic movement. As they were originally esoteric, their diffusion had its limits, and before the era of print such knowledge was not easily available to the public or generally to outsiders. Such systems of the internal bodily centers and arteries are usually called the ‘subtle body’ (in Sanskrit: *suksma-śarīra*, *sukma deha*) in academic and non-academic discourse. However, this term is problematic, and some authors argued (Padoux and Jeanty 2013) that the Sanskrit ‘sūkṣma’ actually refers to another phenomenon, not to the Yogic body consisting of internal webs of *nāḍīs* and *cakras* but to the transmigrating elements in the process of reincarnation: “In all Sanskrit texts, the term *sūkṣma śarīra* (or *sūkṣma deha*), which means ‘subtle body,’ designates not this structure but the transmigrating element in the human being, which is made up of different *tattvas* and therefore has no shape, no visible aspect. It cannot be visualized as is the inner structure of *cakras* and *nāḍī*. We call it yogic body or imaginal yogic body, not subtle body”. (Padoux and Jeanty 2013, p. 10).

In NPV, one’s own body is understood as a microcosmos filled with the Yogic *nāḍīs* and *cakras* and not conceived as separate from the physical body, or at least it is not conceived as such in this text. Hence, I also avoid the unclear term *sūkṣma* (which doesn’t appear in NPV), and simply refer to the body of the practitioner in describing the phenomena of the body. The concept of embodiment and the embodied has its own consequences in the understanding of the religious/mystical experience. In Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā literature generally, the human body is a matrix for “subtle”, internal dimensions, and serves as the basis for transformation (without the body there is no *sahaja*, NPV<sup>17</sup>). Basically, the human body is considered to be a microcosmos and a reflection of the cosmos wherein reside all physical places and mythical ones as well. So, again, what is called *dehatattva* in NPV refers to a body (*deha*), but this is not understood as separate from the physical body. Actually the term ‘*deha*’ embraces everything that is both physical and subtle in the cosmos.

<sup>17</sup> NPV, folio 17a, line 14 *nara vapu vine sahaja anya kebā haya*

## 6. Inner Worlds of the Body

The work starts with the typical Vaiṣṇava invocations and obeisance to gods and masters of the tradition beginning from Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, through Caitanya and his associates and main followers, and up to the direct gurus. Finally, the author or authors direct obeisance towards his guru Mukunda, who as the author of ARV explains the topic of the Primeval Substance (sahaja vastu).<sup>18</sup> He also mentions another guru, Jagannātha Prabhu, as one to whom he is grateful for understanding ‘any meaning of the work of Mukunda’. Moreover, on the order of that guru the narrator starts his endeavor of commenting on the previous works, presenting himself in typical Vaiṣṇava manner as humble and not qualified to complete the difficult task of explaining the esoteric meaning of Mukunda’s (and his disciples’) works.

NPV referring to ARV starts with the description of internal bodily lands (selected excerpts from ARV). The text omits the introductory parts of ARV dealing with some regulations of the sādhanā and starts the commentary with the parts dealing with the adept’s journey to the world of the internal body.<sup>19</sup> The author first refers to ARV and describes the dualistic cosmology relating to the theistic aspects of Tantric Vaiṣṇava doctrine:

*Across the Virajā river is the Land, the eternally blissful village is called Sahajapūra. On the western direction of it is Kalinga kalikā, a heroine of this place is named Campaka kalikā.*<sup>20</sup>

And commentary (NPV):

*Here I present the meaning of this, take the essence and omit the rest. Across the Virajā river is the abode of māyā, the place of common people who indulge in [fulfilling] their desires. If the highest Lord of the Vaikuṇṭha [world] has a desire then he directs [himself] to the māyā world.*<sup>21</sup>

The Virajā River is a mythical river equivalent to the Karana Ocean encircling the world. This river divides the cosmos separating the worlds of the living and the dead. However, one who is doing sahaja sādhanā is actually already dead, as confirmed by other Sahajiyā texts, such as in Caṇḍīdāsa song (*Sahaja manuṣa kothai nai* (Basu (Bose) 1932; Hayes 1995)). It might also be interpreted that the crossing of the Virajā River is an act of initiation—the dead one is the one who is initiated. In other words, one is dead to the world. Moreover, the mystical dimensions of the body are accessible only to those initiated who follow the sādhanā. However, the highest god Kṛṣṇa, lord of heavenly Vaikuṇṭha by his own will descends to the world of māyā and is covered either by a desire (*kāma*) or he is identified with Vaiṣṇava theology with paramātmā, ‘the higher ātmān’. Although descended to the world of māyā, the world of the common people who are filled with desire, that paramātmā is present in the human body as the fusion of male and female elements—*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*:

*Paramātmā of the primeval substance is joined as puruṣa and prakṛti. And even the slightest moment of the narration about him is not devoid of bliss.*<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, in accordance with the Tantric concepts but deeply rooted in older layers of the Indian tradition, the divine appear as divided in the male and female body. Certainly, the cosmogonic myth of the primeval androgynous being (*purusa*), which at the dawn of creation was divided into male and female, is an ancient and persistent motif that originated in the *Upaniṣads* (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad

<sup>18</sup> In translation of selected Bengali terms I derive from G. A. Hayes like: vastu—primeval substance.

<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in later parts the author returns to the subject of the rules of the sādhanā.

<sup>20</sup> NPV, folio 1b, lines 12–15 (this passage comes from ARV): virajā nadir pāra sei deśakhāna, sahaja pūra sadānanda nāme sei grama. tāhāra paścima dige kaliṅga kalika, campaka kalikā nāme tāhāra nayikā. ihāra ye artha tāhā kari nivedana, sārāsāra bujhimāye upākṣā grahana.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem. virajā nadir pāra māyār vasati, sahaja manuṣya vāsa sādhyakāma rati. parama kṛṣṇa vaikuṇṭhera pati, icchā haile tiho jana māyā prati.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, sahaja vastu paramātmā prakṛti puruṣa jeḍho, tila ārdhek kathā e tāra sukha nāhi chāḍā. parama kṛṣṇa vaikuṇṭhera pati, icchā haile tiho jana māyā prati.



I.4, Olivelle 1998). The divine is full of bliss and therefore the Tantric sexual sādhanā as a union of two separated beings brings bliss. This bliss is contained in the bodies of males and females and their union brings ultimate fulfillment:

*If there are not two bodies, there will be not a bliss of paramātmā.<sup>23</sup> Paramātmā is always full of bliss, therefore it is said the name of his village is Sadānanda [always joyful]. Paramātmā is manifested in form of puruṣa and prakṛti [male and female principle]. I firmly explain the body principle—paramātmā assumes a body of the illusion [māyā] ( . . . ). The bliss of paramātmā is found in the divine/sexual discipline, therefore it takes place in the abode of joy.<sup>24</sup>*

Then it is said that the primeval substance *paramātmā* is the union of the prakṛti and puruṣa. Therefore, the abode of paramātmā is called *sadānanda* ('eternally blissful'), because of the nature of the paramātmā, which is infinitely joyful. The author explains in this way the meaning of the *sadānanda grama* ('the village of always blissful'). The following verses then explain how the divine is spread in all directions in the human body—it is like guidance of the visual experience of the divine presence in the human body. Such experience needs an explanation of what the adept might expect in various directions of their internal experience:

*On the eastern direction is a part of the divine, on the western is the site of divine. Behold in both directions, how north and south are explained. On the western side of it there is a fortress of the lord and first I describe the glory of the fortress.<sup>25</sup>*

The term *koṭa* or *koṭha*, quite popular in Tantric literature, denotes a ritual square inhabited by deities. In the Bengali language the term 'koṭha' comes from the Sanskrit *koṣṭha*, which means granary, store-room, treasury or an inner apartment. Bengali dictionaries refer to the meaning of koṭha as 'the chamber', 'fort' (also Sanskrit: koṭa—fort), 'fortress' or 'room'<sup>26</sup>. The Sanskrit 'koṣṭha' semantically refers to an inner encircled chamber room, inner dwelling, shell or limited space. It has a correlation with the Sanskrit *kukṣi*, meaning belly, space in the corpus or inner space, and is correlated with term *kośa* ('layer'). These meanings correlate with koṣṭha as the viscera of the body, particularly the stomach and abdomen (Monier 1899, p. 314). In the Tantric circles, koṭha/koṣṭha/koṭa denote in this way the inner subject of the visualization in the form of the organized square or limited, encircled space. It might be presented as the field of maṇḍala (or bodily maṇḍala), which is divided into equal parts.<sup>27</sup> In this way the human body is also divided into various parts like a chessboard. Moreover, in Yogic literature the term *ādhāra* is used to refer to the place of support in the body and the focus of meditation. This could be interpreted as the equivalent of the koṭa/koṣṭha. There are interesting previous examples of similar uses of symbols in Bengali religious history—in the Buddhist mystical songs *Caryāgīti* (*Cāryapāda*), composed in proto-Bengali (or *apabhraṃśa*), we find a song (no. 12 by Kaṇha) where the metaphor of the chessboard is applied (Kvaerne 2010). Sixty-four fields or koṭha are interpreted as the dwelling place of the yoginīs in the body.<sup>28</sup> The Sanskrit commentary of Munidatta refers to the *nirmāṇa cakra*, which is part of the terminology of the diamond body (*vajra deha*) described in the *Hevajra tantra* (Snellgrove [1959] 2011). The *nirmāṇa cakra*-lotus has sixty-four petals.<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned, NPV describes the various forts or inner chambers in the human body. They are presented as particular places or maṇḍalas that are enumerated as 8, 24 or 32. An experience of the

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, folio 23b: 1. dui liṅga vine paramātmā sukha nahe.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem: folio 1b: 6–8. sadānandamaya paramātmā haya. sadānanda nāma grāma tāhātei kaya. deha nirūpana tattva kahen niściti. paramātmā praveśa kārila māyā dehe, pradhāna prakṛti māyā tāhā āge kahe. paramātmā sukha haya bhager sādhanā, ataeva tāhā haya ānanda dhāme.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, pūrva diḡe bhaga hāra paścime bhaga piḍi, uttara dakṣiṇa dui diḡe dekha vicāri . . . ihār paścime rahe koṭa mahāśaya, koṭer mahimā varṇena prathama karaya.

<sup>26</sup> Murshid (2013).

<sup>27</sup> Term, koṣṭha according to (Tantrikabhidhanakośa II 2004): "The basic square unit or cell in a square grid drawn to help the geometric construction of a maṇḍala". In *Tantrikabhidhanakośa II*: p. 413.

<sup>28</sup> Compare: *Caryāgīti*, song no. 20, P. Kvaerne (2010).

<sup>29</sup> Significantly, *Hevajra-tantra* was probably composed in North-Eastern India (Davidson 2004).

divine element or the particular goddesses dwelling in the human body is based on that structure. Going further in ARV and NPV, mysterious *kaliṅga-kalikā* appear that probably denote the figure in the internal, visualized world. ‘Kaliṅga’ likely indicates the Eastern Indian country Orissa, and ‘kalikā’ is a flower bud. However, in this context it is possible that *kaliṅga* does not designate Orissa but might refer instead to the Coromandel coast (southern part).<sup>30</sup> *Campaka kalikā*—similar to the abovementioned—literally means ‘the bud of the magnolia champaca tree’. She is the heroine (goddess) of that place and ARV describes her as a *śakti*.

*Eight Heroines encircles the divine maṇḍala, in this way he described all heroines, at the root of the divine is a tree that is the fortress of the lord. The golden jasmin was with certainty described.*<sup>31</sup>

In the Tantric manner, this visualized place (square, the fort *koṭa*, *maṇḍala* or place-castle of god/goddess) resembles a flower where *kaliṅga kalikā* is the outer layer and *kāma kali* is the internal bud. According to Hayes (2006), *kaliṅga kalikā* is most probably the place, and the ‘bud of the desire’ (*kāma kali*) is the goddess of this site. On the other hand, the ‘bud of Kaliṅga’ and ‘bud of the desire’ might be interpreted by use of the erotic symbolism where the *bhaga* flower is understood as referring to both the external and internal parts of the female genitalia. The symbolism of the flower as female genitalia is quite obvious and popular. The figure of the bud of the *campaka* flower is described as divinely beautiful and placed at the fort of the stalk of the *Kaliṅga* (*kaliṅga kānti koṭa*). Another passage suggests that *campaka kalikā* also might denote the vagina. Also, the lower pond of desire is localized in the female private parts:

*Indeed there are nine connections in that place, because of this its name is pond of desire. In the cavity of the womb is said that there is pond of desire, eternal substance in the eternal form, all this is beyond one's comprehension.*<sup>32</sup>

Moreover in other places the female figures of goddesses or Vaiṣṇava-style *mañjarīs* represent the sensory faculties (five senses and mind).<sup>33</sup>

### 6.1. Directions in the Inner World

An important part of the text includes narration of the obscure and internal world of the body, which is full of symbolism. Like in the real world, the directions have their own meaning and are variously valued.

*What is in the world, that is in the body, everything was here explained [by author]. In the western direction is the head, in the eastern the foot, the left side and the northern direction were explained.*<sup>34</sup>

The human body is also conceived as divided into the left and right parts and upper and lower parts. Moreover, various internal places like The Village of Infinite Bliss (*sadānandapura*), which is the abode of the Primeval Human, are placed in particular directions. The whole space is filled with the divine presence (*bhaga*),<sup>35</sup> and particular directions lead to the particular places or have special meaning:

<sup>30</sup> It is also worth mentioning that this geographical region is enlisted as the pilgrimage site in older Śaiva and Buddhist sources like *Cakrasaṃvara tantra*, hence it appears very early in the history of the Tantric religions and the term might be understood differently here. I'm grateful for this information from my reviewer.

<sup>31</sup> NPV, folio 2b, 3–4. *aṣṭa nāyikā beḍhā bhager maṇḍala, tāhātei likhilen nāyikā sakala, bhager mūla vṛkkha haya kaṭa mahāśaya, kanaka mallikā bali karilā niścaya.*

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, folio 3b: 1–2. *nava sandhi sei sthāne āchaye sattvar, ei hetu nāma tāra kāma sarovara. bhaga garte kahilena kāma sarovara, nitya vastu nitya rūpa sarva agocara.*

<sup>33</sup> This topic is very common in NPV. Compare the role of the Goddesses of the Senses or Cognition in other Tantric traditions like Krama (Torella 2019, pp. 649–50). NPV propose a similar strategy of satisfying the senses in a controlled way in a ritual to achieve a state of the bliss.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, folio 1b: 12–13. *bhuvanete ye ache dehe ache tāhā, cāridige nirūpana karilen ihā. paścima diga mastaka purvadiga carana, vāma pāše utara dige kailā nirūpana*

<sup>35</sup> The term ‘*bhaga*’ might be variously translated either as divine or more frequently in NPV as ‘womb’ or ‘vagina’.

*On the western side of it is the fortress of the Lord, first I (or it) describe the fortress of the lord.*<sup>36</sup>

*The part of female is placed in the middle part, listen, listen to how it is extended, I tell you its qualities. From the area of thighs its half is placed, land of the hidden moon has its limit here, in the womb land of the hidden moon I described as fourthfold: everywhere all four ghāṭas (landing place) are endowed with jewels.*<sup>37</sup>

*The Highest Lord is joined as womb (bhaga) and penis (liṅga), which is on the right side, the womb is on the left.*<sup>38</sup>

*The fragrant vagina is in the lunar pond ( . . . ) On the left side of the womb there is one gate, on its ghata (landing place) is the transition of the desire, It was said the name of the Pond of Desire.*<sup>39</sup>

*On the north direction is a city of bliss, place of the female (principle). In the southern direction is a place of the blissful consciousness where male principle abides. From here is the blended substance which was from two bodies. In this way it was described 'the land of the lunar light' (candrakānti deśa—probably reference to the lunar nāḍī).*<sup>40</sup>

*In the right part of the head is the pond of immortality, in left direction of that is the pond of pride. Male is in the right side of the body, on the left side the female, this pond was described that way.*<sup>41</sup>

In some cases, some particular spots are fixed, like the Place of the Hidden Moon, where sexo-yogic transformation takes place:<sup>42</sup>

*The Place of the Hidden Moon is inside the female divine principle. See how by placing the blood in semen transformation takes place in the body.*<sup>43</sup>

The procedure of the transformation of the body by fusion of the male and female bodily fluids internally is typical in Tantric yoga.

Those directions are fixed as they appear (e.g., in the head or in the middle of the body), or their location is based on the relations to other places:

*On the right side besides is discipline of the divine love, in that is the City of the Blissful Consciousness, which I have written about.*<sup>44</sup>

*[In the body:] The abode of the paramātmā is the pond of immortality, the root of the reversed lotus is spread there, ( . . . ) the right part is male and on the left side is female. In the head the paramātmā is in the one thousand petals lotus, ( . . . ) in the head in the right side is the pond of immortality, in left direction from that is the pond of pride. The male part is on the right side of the body, on the left side the female, this pond was described with certainty.*<sup>45</sup>

The idea of valorization of a particular direction or side of the body or of the world is common for Vaiṣṇava and Yogic literature. In the *Caitanya caritāmṛta* we find the narrative of searching for treasure,

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, folio 2a, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, folio 3a, 9–11. abalāra aṅga madhye ardha deśa, tāhāra vistāre śuna kahi ye viśeṣa. uru deśa haite tāra ardhek laiya, gupta candra deśa khānī ei haya sīma. bhage guptacandra bali kahilena care, cāri dige cāri ghaṭa ratne khaṭhita kare.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, folio 3b: 12. paramātmā bhaga liṅga ache ekajoge. bhaga vāma pārśve liṅga dakṣina.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, folio 2b, 4–5. bhaga gaṇḍa kuṇḍe candra sarovara haya, prabandha kariyā tāhā likhila niścaye. bhāger vāma pāśe ache eka dvāra, tāra ghāṭa taṭe haya kāmer sañcāra. kāma sarovara nāma ihāte kahilā,

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, folio 12b: 13. uttara dige ānandapur prakṛti vasati, dakṣina dige cidānandapur puruṣer sthiti. joḍā vastu heite puna dui deha haila, candrakānti deśa nāma tāhāte kahila.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, folio 3b, 5–6. mastake dakṣina bhāge akṣaya sarovara, vāma dige haya tāra mana sarovara, dakṣine puruṣa deha vāmete prakṛti, ei sarovara ithe kahila niściti.

<sup>42</sup> That topic is discussed in a more elaborate manner by E.C. Dimock (Dimock 1989).

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem 2b: 8. gupta candra abalāra bhāger bhitare, rakta rete haya dekha deher sañcāre.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem 3a: 16. bhāger dakṣine pāśe premer sādhanā, ithe cidānandapur karila likhana.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, 3a: 2–7. paramātmā sthiti sthāna akṣaya sarovara, ulṭā kamola bāsa tāhāte vistāre. ihā para deha bhava tāhā ye likhilā, dakṣinaṅge puruṣa vāmāṅge abalā. mastakete paramātmā sahasra daṭete . . . mastake dakṣina bhāge akṣaya sarovara, vāma dige haya tāra mana sarovara, dakṣine puruṣa deha vāmete prakṛti, ei sarovara ithe kahila niściti.

which symbolizes the divine love (prema).<sup>46</sup> The digging for hidden treasure symbolizes the search for the ultimate human goal: searching in various directions might bring some gains but only one, the eastern direction, hides the biggest treasure, or *prema bhakti*.

## 6.2. Symbols

NPV claims that knowledge about the body is consistent with recognition of the world: “If you know yourself the fourteen worlds will be known.”<sup>47</sup> In the texts, several key terms appear that fill the world of the body, like flowers, lotus, pond, river, landing place, gate, crossing, bumble bee, antelope, arrow, fortress, cosmic Mount Sumeru, moon and sun. Most of these symbolize spots in the internal worlds and are reflections of the mythological or Yogic themes, others are just an expression of the micro–macrocosmic equivalence. Considering the limited space of the paper, I only briefly refer to some topics related to these.<sup>48</sup>

Internalization of the pilgrimage places, mythical spots and other worlds in the human body are typical for Sants, Bauls and other heterodox groups from the medieval period up the contemporary times (Dasgupta 1946; Vaudeville 1957; Eliade 1969, p. 235; Dimock 1989, pp. 137–38; White 1996; Jhā 1999; Urban 2001a, 2001b; Cantú 2015; Salomon et al. 2017; Mallinson and Singleton 2017, pp. 198–202). The Sahajiyā work *Āropa nirṇāya* claims that 64 krośa Vṛndavāna is extended in the human body.<sup>49</sup> Axis mundi of the world or Mount Sumeru is, for example, identified with the backbone of the yogi.

As Glen Hayes has observed, some of the internal landscapes presented above reflect the deltaic Bengali environment, like in the case of replacing the internal yogic body with fluid, an aquatic system consisting of ponds and rivers (Hayes 2001, 2006). This is a typical Bengali landscape with ponds, lotuses, rivers and landing spots (*ghāṭa*). The narrative about the experiencing of the internal body is also based on Vaiṣṇava mythological themes. The shape of the divine world as a huge flower is widely known in the Vaiṣṇava literature. Also, the Puranic and later medieval Vaiṣṇava descriptions of the divine world present such shapes of the divine world and other cosmic dimensions as well. Undoubtedly, the Tantric context of narration of NPV draws attention to the lotuses as the internal spots in the yogic body. They are presented as the equivalent of the cakras and are also present in the human limbs (like lotuses in the hands and so on). Although the lotus is a universal Indian symbol and here refers to abodes of the powers in the human body, in the mythical and Vaiṣṇava contexts it can refer to the abode of Kṛṣṇa, the Vraja land, which might be also understood on various levels. M. Corcoran classified the image of the Vṛndavāna in the Vaiṣṇava literature as mythical, symbolical and geographical (Corcoran 1995), and concluded that Vaiṣṇava literature generally depicts those first two mythical and symbolical aspects of Vraja. In the case of Tantric Vaiṣṇava literature, we encounter mainly symbolic aspects of Vṛndavāna, where the mythical place is located in the human body.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the world of the human body described in NPV contains places that are difficult to reconcile with the typical Bengali Vaiṣṇava model.

Along with lotuses, another very frequent term that refers to the esoteric spots in the human body is a gate (*dvāra*). NPV put much stress on these ‘gates’ in the internal worlds, which are places in the *ghāṭas* (but not only) that serve as the crossing of various *nāḍīs*. The term *dvāra* appears also in the Yogic Upanishads (Śāstrī 1938; Ruff 2002) and its meaning is correlated with the cakras.

<sup>46</sup> *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Madhya. XX. 112–120; VV, IV, p. 76 (Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvamin 1999): daksine paścime uttara dike nāhi pāi, pūrva dike pāi tin dike dhana nāi.

<sup>47</sup> NPV, folio 2b, 10–11. āpanā jānile jāne e cauddaṃ bhuvana, vistāra kariyā tāhā karilā likhana. bhuvanar madhye ache yata adhikāri deha madhye ghaṭailā tāhā ye vicāri.

<sup>48</sup> An interesting but speculative theory is to correlate such phenomena cognized in the visions of the internal body like lights, waves, flowers or wires with the phosphens (see McDougall 1977).

<sup>49</sup> (*Āropa nirṇāya* (n.d.) (Mss no 2823). Manuscript Library of Calcutta University, Kolkata. śrī śrī rādhā kṛṣṇāya namaḥ. athaḥ āropa nirṇāya likhateḥ caudaṣi krośa vṛndavānaḥ dehete sthitiḥ.

<sup>50</sup> Similar ideas still function amongst the contemporary Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās in Nadia, West Bengal (Sarbadhikary 2015, p. 114, see also Openshaw 2004).

### 6.3. The Network of Nāḍīs in the Human Body

Apart from the obscure mythological picture of the internal body filled with towns, rivers, bathing spots and mysterious goddesses, we find also in NPV the more standard picture of the Yogic Tantric body consisting of the arteries: veins/channels and centers, joints of the systems of internal channels called ponds (sarovaras) or more popularly cakras. In this aspect of the body we find some elements mentioned before like “bodily fortress”, although here the focus is more on the network of subtle arteries. ARV, PM and other correlated texts of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās also provide descriptions of the internal ponds (sarovaras) and lotuses in the body, but they devote only limited space to the description of the internal Yogic arteries. The text of NPV tries to reconcile the archaic model of four (or more) bodily internal centers and the popular six-cakra system. This might be interpreted as the process of adjusting the more popular esoteric Tantric Śakta model of the body to the Vaiṣṇava esoteric concepts, which introduce other visions of the internal body. The description of the internal centers is not clear and homogenized in NPV. However, the commentary on ARV and commentary in NPV repeat the idea of the four ponds (sarovaras) in the human body. They are placed in genitalia, belly, heart and head. Elsewhere, other passages in NPV present a more complex picture of the internal ponds and enumerate a higher number of the sarovaras.

On the other hand, NPV describes in detail the internal nāḍīs, which have their origin in ‘the pond of immortality’ where Paramātmā dwells, before the primeval substance is transported to other places in the body. The cosmic and earthly rivers and ponds are connected and flow through the human body. The texts give a popular scheme of three nāḍīs: “there are three main nāḍīs: iḍā piṅgalā suṣumnā.”<sup>51</sup> However, it also provides a more elaborate description of the nāḍīs. The arteries in the human body are primarily understood as rivers, and experience of the divine comes from the presence of a divine element and microcosmic equivalencies. The origin of the bodily arteries is paramātmā, which dwells in the highest point of the cosmos (Mount Sumeru) and respectively in the human head. This internal place is called the ‘pond of immortality’ (aksaya sarovara). Hence, experience of the divine in one’s own body means obtaining knowledge about the network of internal rivers in the human body. The author describes the nine nāḍīs and twenty-four koṭhā (fortresses):

*In the Pond of immortality [in the head] is the abode of paramātmā, there having grown the wave has fallen. The wave has fallen to the Pond of Rādhā, and this wave mixed with Virajā [river]. From Virajā it has fallen to Revāta [river], and from Revāta [Narbada] the crooked river was formed. From the crooked river to the Yamuna it gave large wave; our people understand it, common beings [jīvā] do not.*<sup>52</sup>

The author then correlates the cosmic level with the bodily level:

*Hingulā nāḍī is fused with the piṅgalā. Look, how piṅgalā is encircled with Karana ocean. In the middle region there are gathered all twenty-four [nāḍī].*<sup>53</sup>

*The fort and luminous arteria (nāḍī) has a luminous, inner fort and inner nāḍī have quality of the tama guṇa.*<sup>54</sup> *Inside the nāḍī dwells bhutātmā [living being of matter]. You will for certain recognize the cinnabar fort and cinnabar nāḍī, in this is being eaten the nectar ...*

<sup>51</sup> NPV, folio 6a: 10–11.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, folio 10b: 3–5. aksaya sarovare paramātmā sṭhiti, tāhā uthaliyā bāna niścaya paḍila niściti. rādhā kuṇḍe āsi bāna niścaya paḍila, sei bāna dheu āsi virajā miśāila. virajā bāna āsi revāte paḍiyā, revā heite bāmkā nāḍī paḍila gaḍiyā. bāmkā heite yamunār dila bahu dheu, mānuṣa bujhaye jīve nā bujhaye keu.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, line 6. hingulā nāḍī āche piṅgalāte joḍa, piṅgalā achaye dekha kārānārnave beḍa. nāḍī deśa madhye sava batriser gaṇa.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, line 10–11. kirana kuṭī kiraṇa nāḍī raja guṇa sṭhiti, dhīra kuṭī dhīra nāḍī tamoguṇa sṭhiti.



*The blazing fort and the blazing nāḍī are where himself eternal Śiva dwells. It is said that are three: the bones, the marrow and the flesh. These three substances are joined in [nāḍī] hīṅgulā. Three guṇas and those three substances form everything.*<sup>55</sup>

As we can see, this model is significantly different from other Tantric traditions and clearly connects the cosmos with the human body through the medium of the divine rivers that flow directly down to the human body.

#### 6.4. Conclusions

In the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā traditions religious experience is presented as the process of discovering one's own body as microcosmic and full of divine potential and energies. The subject is like a traveler through their own body, encountering hidden spots and choosing between various alternative paths. Relating to the abovementioned classification of the mystical states we have here dualistic, visual and bhakti experience. In this way the text reflects visionary or mystical experience, or at least provides a map for such experience. It is more of a 'visionary guidebook' or 'guidebook of ritual visualization' than a description of personal experience. The author/authors explain the previous texts for the benefit of adepts of the tradition and ensure that one achieves those visions or internal worlds if one strictly follows the path. In the case analyzed above we are dealing with narratives about unique states and imaginary places experienced by the adepts of the Tantric Vaiṣṇava tradition that are possible to experience during sādhanā. In cases of visions and altered experiences, one's own body is experienced differently. In NPV the subject is confronted with an alternate vision of the human body and travels through the different internal landscapes by way of a net of internal arteries or rivers. The picture of the human body described in NPV is dramatically different from any that we experience in a common state of consciousness, and it might be called a mystical body. This kind of experience has ultimate meaning for the subject who experiences the divine presence and the whole cosmos in their own body.

We might differentiate the following components of that experience or experiences as follows:

- the dominating experience of moving or travelling through one's own body by use of the nets of internal arteries of rivers and meeting various figures or exploring various internal places like villages, ponds or crossings;
- photic experiences—various experiences during the discipline are described as various colorful lights;
- experience of the cosmos, elements and gods in the human body;
- experience of a divinity in the human body on various levels and in the ritual with the opposite sex, which is considered to be achieving wholeness;
- fluidity of the experience, which is similar to waves and is analogous to the process of tasting;
- the bliss coming from the discipline of the divine, whose presence in the human body is underlined in various ways;
- sexual bliss as correlated with the bliss of paramātmā and the state of union and crossing the dualities.

We may use various strategies to interpret the various mystical experiences in NPV. The key factor is to analyze the use of the symbolic and metaphorical language that express religious experience. The text uses specific vocabulary but also refers to universal symbols like trees, rivers and animals and correlates them with the particular parts of the body understood as microcosms. In the text we find universal symbols like trees, rivers and animals correlated with the model of the body as microcosm, which was popular in esoteric circles and widely recognized in Indian Tantric and Yogic

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, line 11–14. nāḍī madhye eka nāḍī bhutātmā rahe, hīṅgulā kuṭhi hīṅgulā nāḍī jānibe niścaye. ei nāḍī caranāmṛta karaye bhakṣane ... ujjvala kuṭi ujjvala nāḍī svayaṁ sadāsiva rahe, asti marjā māṁsa ei tin kahe. ei tin vastu āche hīṅgulāte joḍa, tin guṇe tin vastu sakaler gaḍā.

traditions (Bagchi and Śastri 1956, Kvaerne 2010). Another interesting perspective might be provided by a broader analysis of Asiatic literature in which we consult archaic models of reality expressed through anthropomorphism and micro–macrocosmic equivalencies (Braginsky 2001).

Sanderson (1988, p. 687) and White (2003, pp. 221–22) demonstrated that schemes of the so-called subtle body (“Yogic body”) differ in various traditions, and that one universal model has probably never existed, with each school having its own idea of the Yogic body. Various motifs like division of the body and mythological themes create a basis for the specific religious experience. The visions and religious experiences presented in NPV are undoubtedly structured by a human body. Those experiences and their description in NPV are also presented in accordance with the classification of reality via binary or triadic structures that were popular in Indian and Tantric thought. I argue that the religious symbols and metaphors appearing in the work are based on the human body. As some authors have argued the human body and its physiological processes might be considered the source of symbols and classificatory schemas (Turner 1970; Ellen 1977; Jacobson-Widding 1979; Hemming 2012). As Victor Turner claimed: “The human organism and its crucial experiences are the fons et origo of all classifications ( . . . ) The perception of these colors [white, red and black] and of triadic and dyadic relations in the cosmic and society, either directly or metaphorically, is a derivative of primordial psychobiological experience—experience that can be fully attained only in human mutuality” (Turner 1970, p. 90). Hence Turner’s theory might be applied here to better understand the importance of the dualistic and triadic classification present in the narration of the Tantric experience presented in NPV. It also refers to the importance of the biological process and its effect in the form of bodily fluids, which are so basic for the Tantric sādhanā. The text and other works of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā and other Tantric traditions heavily depended on the various classifications of the reality based on the structure and processes of the human body. They organize reality a specific way and create a matrix of religious experience. Those somatic concepts were expressed in the various classifications, but mainly binary (purusa-prakṛiti, rasa-rati) and triadic (three nāḍīs, three guṇas, three doṣa, three gods—all present in the body and regulating its processes). The importance of some of these classifications in the Indian thought and the concepts of the body are based on the relation between three spheres—microcosmos, mesocosmos and macrocosmos—as well as binary classifications like agneya-saumya, which was emphasized for example by White and Das (White 1996, pp. 10–12, 15, 16; Das 2013, p. 521). Finally we may find similar ideas to those presented in NPV in other Asiatic esoteric systems like Daoism. In NPV the human body is a reflection of the cosmos but it is also a landscape—the environment is present in the human body and is fused with the mythical elements. Kristofer Schipper describes in his classical work the Daoist method of “keeping the one” (Schipper 1993, pp. 140–44), and provides us with fascinating analogues to the NPV example of the narration of the mystical dimension of the human body from the classical *Book of the Yellow Court* (*Huang Ting Jing*, 3rd–4th century). Let this citation serve as the ending theme of our short travel through the mysterious world of the body:

In the Yellow Court sits someone dressed in scarlet.  
The door is locked, its two leaves tightly closed.  
The Dark Towers rise to the vertiginous heights.  
In the Cinnabar Field, semen [“essence” . . . ] and breath subtly mingle.

Above, the clear water of the Jade Fountain flows abundantly,  
Making the Divine Root sturdy and hard.  
In the Center Lake a noble person, dressed in red.  
Below lies the Field, three inches away, there is where the god lives.  
Look the passage between the Inner and the Outer with a double lock.

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## Abbreviations

ARV	<i>Amṛtaratnāvalī</i> of Mukundadeva
NPV	<i>Nigūḍhārthaprakāśāvalī</i>
PM	<i>Padmamāla</i> of Prema Dāsa
VV	<i>Vivartavilāsa</i> of Ākiñcanadāsa

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